Alvin Aaron Coffey.

Mills Seminary P.O.

PHOTOGRAPH IN VOL. VI. PAGE 17.

A. A. Coffey.

.--- oOo ---

I started from St Louis Missouri, on the 2nd day of April in 1849. There was quite a crowd of the neighbors who drove through the mud and rain to St Joe to see us off. About the 1st of May we organized the train. There were twenty wagons in the number and from three to five men to each wagon.

We crossed the Missouri River at Savanna Landing on about the 6th, no, the 1st week in May. There were several trains ahead of us. I was one of the three who were on the first night guard. At 12 o'clock three more men took our place and we went to camp. At 6 in the morning there were three more went to relieve those on guard. One of that three that came in had Cholera so bad that he was in lots of misery. Doctor Basset, the Captain of the train, did all he could for him, but he died at 10 O'clock, and we buried him. We got ready and started at 11 the same day and the moon was new just then.

We got news every day that people were dying by the hundreds in St Joe and St Louis. It was alarming. When we hitched up and got ready to move the Dr said, "Boys we'll have to drive day and night".

There were only three saddle-horses in the train Dr Basset, Mr Hale Sr, and John Triplet owning them. They rode with the Dr to hunt camping places. We drove night and day and got out of reach of the Cholera. There was none ahead of us that we knew of.

Dave and Ben Headspeth's train was ahead of us. They had 14, or 15 wagons in the train and three to five men to a wagon. Captain Camel had another such train. When we caught up with them, we never heard of one case of Cholera on their trains.

We got across the plains to Fort Larimie the 16th

of June and the ignorant ox driver broke down a good many oxen on the trains. There were a good many ahead of us, who had doubled up their trains and left tons upon tons of bacon and other provisions.

When we got pretty well down the Humboldt to a place called Lawsons Meadow, which was quite away from the sink of the Humboldt, the emigrants agreed to divide there. There was good grass at Lawsons Meadow. We camped there a day and two nights, resting the oxen, for we had a desert to cross to get to Black Rock where there was grass and water.

Starting to cross the desert to Black Rock at 4 o'clock in the evening we traveled all night. The next day it was hot and sandy. When within 20 miles of Black Rock, we saw it very plainly.

A great number of cattle perished before we got to Black Rock. When about 15 miles from Black Rock, a team of four oxen was left on the road just where the oxen had died. Every thing was left in the wagon.

I drove our oxen all the time and I knew about how much an ox could stand. Between 9 and 10 o'clock a breeze came up and the oxen threw up their heads and seemed to have new life.

At noon we drove into Black Rock.

Before we reached Sacramento Valley, we had poor feed a number of nights. The route by way of the Humboldt was the oldest and best known to Hangtown.

We crossed the South Pass on the 4th of July. The ice next morning was as thick as a dinner-plate.

About two days before we got to Honey Lake we were in a timbered country. We camped at a place well known as -Rabbit Hole Springs -. An ox had given out and was down, not able to get up, about 100 yards from the spring.

Awhile after it got dark as it was going to be, the ox commenced bawling pitifully. Some of the boys had gone to bed.

I said -"let's go out and kill the ox for it is too bad to hear himbawl". The wolves were eating him up alive. None would go with me, so I got two double-barreled shot guns which were

loaded. I went out where he was. The wolves were not in sight, although I could hear them. I put one of the guns about five or six inches from the oxs' head and killed him the first shot. The wolves never tackled me. I had reserved three shots in case they should.

When we got to Deer Creek in Sacramento Valley, we divided up wagons. Some went to Sacramento to get provisions for the winter and came up to Redding Springs later.
We camped several days at Honey Lake, but the grass on Madeline Plains was not very good.

While Headspeth and a guide we had were hunting the best path to Sacramento road, the cattle recruited up nicely. We took several days to go from Honey Lake to Sacramento Valley.

Those that kept on from Deer Creek to Redding Springs camped at Redding Springs the 13th day of October 1849.
Eight to ten miles drive was a big one for us at the latter end. The last four miles the cattle had nothing to eat but poison-oak brush. We cut down black oaks for them to browse on, and got to Redding Springs the next day about 4 o'clock.
We watered the oxen out of buckets that night and morning. The next day we gatheredthem up, drove them down to Clear Creek where they had plenty of poison-oak to eat.

On the morning of the 15th we went to dry-digging mining. We dug and dug till the first of November, at night it commenced raining, and rained and snowed pretty much all the winter. We had a tent but it barely kept us all dry.
There were from eight to twelve in our camp. We cut down pine trees for shakes to make a cabin. It was a whole week before we had a cabin to keep us dry.

The Doctor was sick the whole winter. Parson Eckard visited him the first Sunday in January. He was in the habit of coming every Sunday, as he and the Doctor were Masons.
The first Sunday in January, the Doctor asked the Parson how much flour he had to sell and how he was selling it?

Parson said - he had a few hundred pound sacks to sell and they were $275. a sack.

The Doctor said, our flour was about out. It was two miles to Eckards camp and Doctor says "I'll send Alvin down tomorrow morning after a sack." After breakfast, Monday morning, Doctor says "Alvin, weigh out $275. and go and get a sack of the Parsons flour". I went to the Parsons and told him I came for the flour. He said - "How much money did you bring" ? I said -"$275 a sack, as I heard you tell the doctor you was willing to sell it for that". He says "I have raised $25 on it since yesterday." I says then, let me have the flour and I will get the other $25." He said -"no you go and get the other $25 and I will let you have the flour". Isays-"here, you wont trust me with the flour, I wont trust you with the money". That was the first saucy word I ever spoke to a white man. Then I went back to camp and told the doctor the parson had raised $25 on the flour, he said -"let Parson go to Hell"! I have made a better bargain since you have been gone. He was doctoring two brothers about 200 yds from camp. They concluded to go to San Francisco for their health. They had a 200 lb sack of flour more than needed and were willing to sell it for $500 a sack. Doctor says -"Alvin, make the $275. to 500 and go get the flour." I paid the $500 and got the flour.

The last week in February, flour was coming into camp. We got a sack of the Parson for $60. The first week in January 1850 we bought 100 lbs of bear meat at a dollar per pound. I asked the man how many poundshe had sold and he said -"I've sold 1300 lbs and have 400500 lbs in camp yet."

I gave the men considerable, for helping me to dress it.

My Father's name was Larkin Coffey. He was an Octoroon. He was raised on the Coffey Plantation in Tennessee. The Coffey feud was well known in Tennessee. My Mother's name (maiden) was Nellie Cook. She was born and raised in Maison County Kentucky.

Reminiscence of my Early Life.

Henry H/ Duvall, in 1846 sold me to Dr Bassett for $600, He made his brags that he sold a dead negro for $600.
I worked on Dr Bassets farm three years. The common price for a hand like me was $120 a year. It amounted to $360. and then in '49 I came to California with him.

I worked thirteen months for him in California. I saved him, $5,500. in gold dust. I saved $616. of my own money in gold dust.

Going home in 1851 we went by the way of New Orleans. He said--"let us go to the mint and have our gold coined"--. He kept my money (616 dollars) and when we got up into Missouri, he sold me for a thousand more.
My labor on his farm amounted to $360, I made $5500 for him in California, he kept my $616 I had saved and sold me for $1000; in this way clearing $6,876 clear profit.

There is one man in California, who can witness these facts and figures. Thw witness to this,-is--Titus Hale.-.

Reminiscence of Slavery.

In the Spring of 1850, Dr Basset changed climate, as his health was bad. We went to Fremont and stayed two or three weeks. I worked by the day and got $16. a day. I kept no account of that We then went to Sacramento. I got to talking with a livery-stable man who wanted some grass cut for hay. He took his boat and went about seven miles above Sacramento. It was very fine blue-point grass and the water was falling from it very fast. We asked him how much he wanted cut, he said "Idont care how much you cut". The next question was -"How much will you give us a ton" ? I will give you $80. for every ton you cut.
We started in about the 1st of May and quit about the last of June 1850. We went down and got the stable-man and weighed it and it weighed 137 tons. The Doctor got 1/5th of that money; 137 tons at $80 a ton amounts to $10960, and 1/5th of that is $2,196 Now adding this #2,196 to that $6,876 profit he had made off of me before and it amounts to $9,068clear profit. Some say slavery is not profitable!

The day we left Humboldt at Lawson's Meadows, I forget the day of the week or month, we started in at three o'clock in the afternoon to make the desert. We drove that evening, and all night. When day came we were in sight of Black Rock. When we got within about ten miles of Black Rock, the sun was hot and the sand was deep. One of the oxen got leg-weary. I drove them out to the side and let them rest about an hour.

The ox that was tired, I gave a bucket of water. In about an hour a breeze blew up and I pulled them in the road and let them take their time.

It was getting towards noon when we made Black Rock. There were lots of springs around there and pretty good grass. We unyoked the oxen and were herding them around on the best of the grass. The hot springs were pretty plentiful, and some of the branches were cool enough for the oxen to drink. The greatest trouble was to keep them far enough from the springs from falling in. With all of our care, one dropped in with his hind feet. The notice was given and eight or ten men came around in a few minutes. They got him by the horns, ears and jaws and soon pulled him up on the bank. There were a few of us standing behind the ox and as soon as we got him up high enough, some of us caught him by the tail. Every hair came out of his tail while we were pulling him up.

There was a high-toned Frenchman named Charlie H. Rhodeman. He had a very nice saddle-horse, and was a great friend of Dr Bassett. Sometimes he would eat with us, and other times some where else.

When he got close to Black Rock he picketed his horse on good grass and went to climbing Black Rock. He got up about 200 yards, and came down double quick. He had on mocasins and made pretty long jumps coming down, for he thought his feet were blistered. I dont beleive there was a sprig of vegetation on the rock, and Rhodeman said -"it was as hot as Hell". There was one big boiling spring dose to the rock

They tied several picks and ropes together and tied it on

a large rock and put it in the spring, but could not ever feel the bottom.

Put a piece of bacon on the string and let it down in this spring, and it would cook it as quick as the hottest fire you could make.

We fried out a lot of bacon-grease and greased the oxens tail and legs. The hair had come off of his legs, as well as well as his tail. His dew-claws came off with the hair but the main hoofs stayed on nicely.

I have not the day and date for these circumstances, but these are positive facts.

This is one of the many circumstances, and experiences of 1849.

----- oOo -----